

REMARKS

Claims 1-4, 6-8, 9-12, 14 and 15 stand rejected under 35 USC 103(a) as allegedly being unpatentable over Rodriguez et al. Claim 5 and 13 stand rejected under 35 USC 103(a) as allegedly being unpatentable over Rodríguez et al in view of Panepinto. Applicants again respectfully traverse these rejections.

As stated previously, the claimed invention is based at least in part on Applicants' discovery that water of high salinity, such as sea water which is normally not suitable for leather processing, may be used in an initial (soaking) operation if the soaking in the saline water is done in the presence of a salt of an alkali metal or alkaline earth metal. This is clearly defined in steps i) and ii) of Claim 1. Leather processing is water intensive and the present invention provides an option to use readily available seawater for leather processing.

The process of Panepinto differs significantly from the claimed process as in column 3, lines 43-45 of Panepinto it is stated that "In general, a time of from 15 to 45 minutes will be used when goatskin is being treated using a paste of about equal parts lime, sodium sulfide and water." In column 3, line 72-column 4, line 5, that following exposure of the skin to the paste consisting of about 1 part by weight of sodium sulfide and 2 parts by weight of both lime and water for about 20 minutes, the excess paste was removed and the skin was immediately immersed in the hydrochloric acid containing dissolved ammonium sulfate. Following this the skin is washed. Furthermore, it is stated in column 4, lines 32, that the skin should be contacted for a minimum time. Clearly this

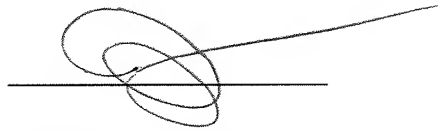
reference can be distinguished from the claimed invention as in step i) of the Claim 1, the a raw hide or skin is treated for a period of not less than 12 hours and in step ii) the soaked hide or skin is treated for a period of not less than 6 hours. This time course is not obvious from Panepinto as the premise of the reference is that any prolonged treatment of the hide or skin with lime, sodium sulfide and hydrochloric acid will damage the hide or skin and make it unusable.

As stated previously, Rodriguez does not teach the use of saline water containing 11,000 to 3,000 ppm of chlorides and i) treating a rawhide or skin with not less than 300% w/v of saline water containing 11000 to 30000 ppm of chlorides, in the presence of not less than 0.04%w/v of salt of an alkali metal or alkaline earth metal, either individually or in any combination thereof, for a period of not less than 12 hours to obtain soaked hides/skins, ii) treating the hide or skin with not less than 2% w/w of alkali metal in combination with not more than 200% w/v of saline water for a period of not less than 6 hours. (Emphasis added).

Therefore, given the differences between the claims and the combination of the two references, it is clear that it is not obvious to treat the hides or skins as applicants' claim with the reagents and for the time set out in the claims.

In view of the above, it is respectfully submitted that all rejections have been overcome because the claims are not obvious and that the application is now in allowable form. An early notice of allowance is earnestly solicited and is believed to be fully warranted.

Respectfully submitted,

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